



Camels and Eagles and Bears...Oh My!

Civil War
Mascots



General Asboth and his dog York go off to battle at Pea Ridge

Mascots during the Civil War ranged from the ordinary to the bizarre. Many animals held this elite position and were lavished with affection, enjoying a good life and rarely going hungry. Some mascots went into battle with the soldiers while others stayed safely in the rear, and if killed, they were often buried with full military honors with the entire regiment turning out for the funeral. Several companies even became better known for their mascots than their service records. Both sides used specific animals as emblems and representations of loyalty and bravery. The mascot brought unity and identity to the fighting men, and effectively raised morale. Whether as an inspiration in battle, or representation of a beloved pet, the animal mascots elevated the spirits of the soldiers during a dark and distressing period of the nation’s history.

Douglas the Camel–
Mascot of the 43rd
Mississippi Infantry



The use of camels by the U.S. Army started as a military strategy developed to circumvent the loss of vast numbers of horses and mules to dehydration in the southwest. Seen as a plausible alternative, the camel was promoted by western military men, and when Jefferson Davis, who had an avid interest in the project, ascended to the cabinet position of secretary of war in 1853, he had the political clout to make the experiment happen.

When the Army started importing and buying camels in 1856, Jefferson Davis foresaw a day that every southern planter would have a pair to do the work on the farm— not as a replacement for oxen or mules or horses, but as yet another tool.

The camel that became known as Old Douglas spent about a year in Mississippi, carrying the regimental band instruments for the 43rd Mississippi. Mystery surrounds

how he came to be in Mississippi in the first place, but speculation is that a soldier assigned to duty in Texas when the war started, decided to return home to fight in Mississippi. He most likely absconded with one of the camels, seeing as they were government property and not free for the taking.

Douglas’ first known appearance was at Iuka, Mississippi, and the story goes that the horses in the unit (who had never seen a camel before) were terribly spooked when Douglas broke his tie chain and got loose. The horses were tied to wooden pickets, and when they broke free, wreaked havoc as they ran terrified through the camp pulling the wooden posts behind them.

It is believed Old Douglas was also in Corinth and Vicksburg, ultimately meeting his demise at the latter, shot by a Union sharpshooter. There, legend has it, he was carved up, possibly eaten, and his bones made into souvenirs by Federal soldiers.

Old Abe - The
Wisconsin War
Eagle



Have you seen the great granite effigy of an eagle atop the Wisconsin State Memorial? That’s "Old Abe", the Wisconsin war eagle. Born near the headwaters of the Chippewa River in the wilds of northern Wisconsin, Abe was captured by a young Indian of the Lake Flambeau tribe of Chippewa during the summer of 1861. He was swapped to a Mrs. Daniel McCann for a bushel of corn, and later Mr. McCann took the young eagle to Eau Claire, where a company of soldiers was being recruited for the Civil War. Here, a civilian, S.M. Jeffers, purchased the eagle for \$2.50 and presented it to the new "Company C" of the 8th Wisconsin Regiment - the color regiment. The young eagle was named "Old Abe" in honor of President Lincoln, and as mascot of Company C, (known throughout the war and ever afterward as "The Eagle Regiment") accompanied the regiment into every battle and skirmish in which it participated. The eagle was carried alongside the colors, becoming attached to the flag and recognizing it as his companion.

After 25 battles and as many skirmishes, Company C, 8th Wisconsin, mustered out

and, with Old Abe, arrived home in Madison, Wisconsin. On 26 September 1864, the famous war eagle was formally presented to Governor James T. Lewis and the State of Wisconsin. Old Abe was given permanent quarters in a large room in the basement of the State Capitol Building, and often sat upon a perch in the park, where he was visited by thousands of people. From time to time he was taken to patriotic gatherings throughout the country, and, in time, became more famous during peace than in the war.

One cold day in the winter of 1881, paints and oils near the eagle caught fire, filling the corridors and his cage room with dense clouds of smoke and noxious gases. He sickened from the fumes and was never again well. The following March the eagle died in the arms of his keeper, George Gillies. His body was mounted to look as natural as in life and it stood in a glass case in the capitol until 27 February 1904, when it burned in the capitol fire. Old Abe dead and mounted had seemed to attract as many visitors as when he was alive and there were as many mourners for him when he burned as when he had died.

A Soldier's Best Friend...



Major – 29th Maine Infantry



Jack – 102nd Pennsylvania Infantry

Dogs were by far the most popular army mascots during the Civil War. Valued both for their companionship and the fact that they could be trained to help forage for food, carry supplies, or even search for dead and wounded soldiers, dogs indeed became the soldiers' best friend.

Dogs allowed soldiers a way to express affection and tenderness under terrible circumstances, so most dogs were tolerated by the commanding officers. Some even learned how to please these officers. The 5th Connecticut Infantry had a 15- lb black and tan terrier which had a peculiar respect for officers and could find whoever was in command wherever he went. If the whole company was out, the dog kept close to the captain. If only a platoon, he kept with the sergeant. On dress parades, which he always attended, he left the company and went to the colonel and watched the parade pass. He became one of the lucky mascots, and by staying with the officers, survived the war.

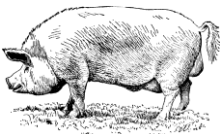
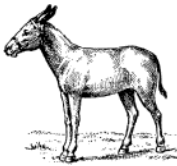
Some dogs were picked up along the way but a surprising number of the animals were brought from home by the soldiers and remained loyal, often watching over the graves of their masters.

One of the most famous of the dog mascots was Sallie, a Staffordshire Bull Terrier with the 11th Pennsylvania Infantry. Sallie was a puppy when 1st Lt. William R. Terry brought her to the regiment. She grew up as the beloved companion of the entire regiment, marching with them to the battlefield. Lost at Gettysburg, Sallie was found days later, guarding the wounded and dead of her regiment. She managed to survive until late in the war, when she was killed by a bullet during the battle at Hatcher's Run, Virginia. Her regiment buried her where she fell, doing so while under heavy fire. So devoted was the 11th Pennsylvania to their mascot, that she is represented on their regimental marker on the Gettysburg battlefield, lying near the base of the statue.



Sallie – 11th Pennsylvania Infantry

Mascots Most Unusual...



Unusual mascots abounded on both sides during the Civil War. The Confederate 3rd Louisiana had a donkey which would push into the commander's tent trying to sleep with his owner. Unfortunately, it kept mistaking other officers for his owner.

Bears were popular mascots. Both Wisconsin and Minnesota boasted brigades with bears. When Union forces took West Liberty Kentucky in 1861, their list of captured animals included 52 horses, 10 mules, and one large bear. The 12th Wisconsin Volunteers had a bear (said to weigh over 300 pounds), that marched with them to Missouri, while a Minnesota brigade claimed a young bear that had "smelt powder" in twelve engagements and returned home unharmed.

Feathered mascots were found in many army camps. The Confederate 3rd Tennessee Regiment's gamecock "Jake," escaped the stewpot to become a prized fighter, taking on rivals from other companies. When the unit was captured at Ft. Donelson, Jake went to Camp Douglas Prison along with the men. When the 3rd mustered out, Jake went with them and was welcomed back along with the men by most of Cornersville, Tennessee.

Another, probably even more famous, feathered mascot also served a special function for one of the war's most prominent generals. For most soldiers during the Civil War, fresh food was often a delicacy that had to be gotten by less than honorable means. Yet General Robert E.

Lee was guaranteed a fresh egg every day. The honor was not due to the fact that Lee was the commanding general of the Confederate Army, but rather because he had befriended a hen who traveled with him, gifting him with an egg she laid under his cot every morning. When this prized, pet hen was lost during the Battle of Gettysburg, Lee and the rest of his men were highly distressed until she could be found.

Lee's pet hen was the rule rather than the exception. Many Civil War regiments took animals along as mascots or pets. Some of the more unusual included pelicans, badgers, raccoons, wildcats, pigs, sheep, and even a squirrel owned by a Confederate drummer who would dance to the beat of his master's drum.

Animals adopted as mascots during the Civil War, no matter the species, traveled with the Union and Confederate armies into the thick of battle, providing companionship and entertainment along the way, while enjoying the attention and devotion of entire regiments. Their presence provided comfort during a turbulent time by the men who claimed them.

